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Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Netherlands Association of Women's Interests, Women's Work and Equal Citizenship, Soroptimist International, Soroptimist International of Europe and Women for Water Partnership, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Access to Water and Sanitation are key for Women Emancipation and Development in General

Despite the commitment of member states to targets 6.1 and 6.2 (universal access to water and sanitation) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)/Agenda 2030 and recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women 60 agreed conclusions, according to the United Nations Water synthesis report these targets are seriously lacking behind and will not be met at current "speed" (United Nations Water synthesis report 2018).

Access to and equal management of water and sanitation (and as a minimum access to basic, public, services on Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are prerequisites for women's development and empowerment. The water-related labour market, financial independence, education and good health are all unlocked by access to water and sanitation.

Women play a pivotal role in water management. Although this principle has been part of the legacy of and policy on water since 1992 (Dublin principles, 1992), the implementation needs a real boost. Acknowledging women's traditional and modern roles in water management and governance can help unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals six (water and sanitation) and five (equality and empowerment) and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in water.

Current reports show, there will be a huge lack of trained professionals to ensure the water-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals; one of the reasons is that women have not enough access to relevant education or jobs/hired in these fields (International Water Association, 2014).

It should be emphasized that pursuant to the human rights to water and sanitation, countries have an obligation to progressively provide safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services, including in the workplace. Countries also have the obligation to guarantee that the right to water is enjoyed without discrimination and equally between men and women. Meeting this obligation will remove one of the major hurdles to girls and adult women having the opportunity to go to school, obtain the appropriate education and training, and hold positions in the workplace, further adding to the economies' skilled human resource capacity. Clean, safe and readily (uninterrupted) available water in medical posts, homes, schools, workplaces and training institutions is therefore another prerequisite to a healthy economy (edited from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011a). As such, investing in water is a winning proposition from economic, environmental and social standpoints.

In many countries, droughts, floods and deforestation increase the risks for women and girls by itself and because of lack of information, persistent cultural roles, etc. Loss of housing, livelihoods and even death are impacting women and girls more than men, because they are left behind including by lack of coping mechanisms due to cultural restraints.

It (also again) increases unpaid time girls and women spend to retrieve water for household chores and small-scale farming e.g., leaving them less time for education or earning an income (International Labour Organization, 2013a; United Nations Development Programme, 2014). Lack of coping mechanisms leads to

exponential increase of female-headed/one parent households and internal displacement.

Supporting women, give them a say at the table to decide on policies and measures to prevent disasters, build their resilience are crucial elements to prevent death and destruction as a result of natural disasters.

A lot of investment in water-related infrastructure turns out to be dysfunctional after a very short period of time. One of the main reasons is the lack of maintenance and management due to lack of structural funding and capacity (and not tapping into the competences of local women). To make infrastructure sustainable (affordable, appropriate, accessible), women need to be involved in the design and decision-making and be enabled to play a (professional, paid) role in the upkeep of the infrastructure (e.g. multiple reports from the World Bank).

Large infrastructure and building of dams e.g. for hydropower and/or irrigation often lead to displacement of local populations and hence to obviously problems for women and their families. Even if new jobs are created, they are often not suitable to replace loss of income and livelihoods requiring different skill-sets. The use of tools like the Hydropower sustainability assessment protocol can lead to different decisions and designs.

Women for Water Partnership urges you to:

- Follow-up on the recommendations of the special rapporteur on the gender aspects of human rights to water and sanitation.
- Follow-up on the recommendations of the World Water Development report 2016: A number of measures can be undertaken to improve women's participation in, and contribution to the water-related workforce, including: adopting equal opportunity policies and measures; improving sex-disaggregated workforce data sets; addressing cultural barriers, social norms and gender stereotypes; and expanding access to public services and investment in time - and labour saving infrastructure (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — World Water Assessment Programme, World Water Development Report 2016)
- Acknowledge women's traditional and modern roles to unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 5 combined and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in "water"
- Invest in vocational education/training for women (in non-traditional occupations) to ensure they can obtain jobs in also managing and maintaining water-related infrastructure and better managing water use in many occupations such as agriculture, health care, etc.
- Adapt human resource policies together with business and other organizations to enhance the gender balance in the workplace at all levels
- Promote the use of the Hydropower Sustainable Assessment protocol to ensure social impacts are taken into account
- Promote the adoption of the Women Empowerment principles.
- Agree to a dedicated World Water Day on water and women that can help to unlock this major, persisting issue.